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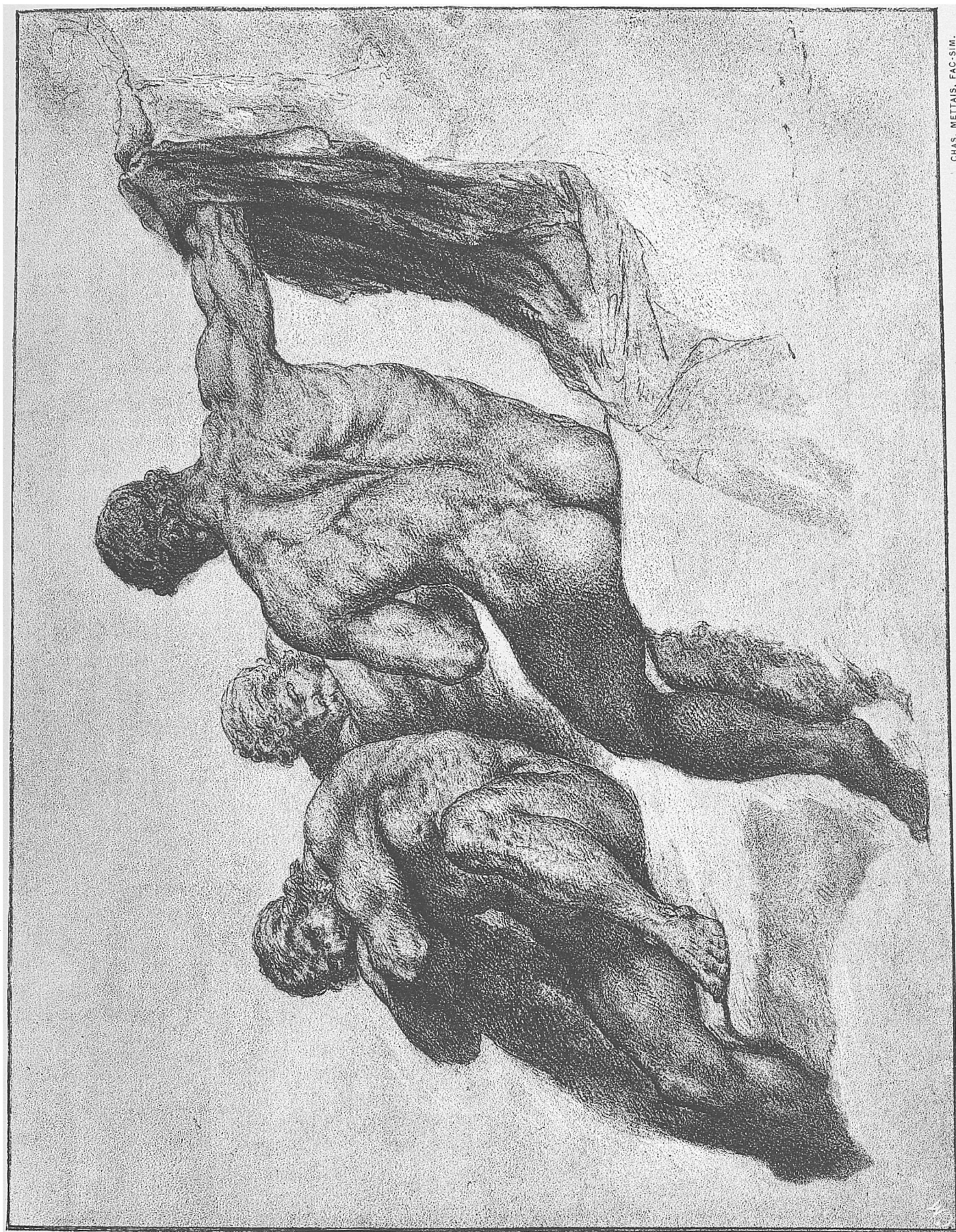
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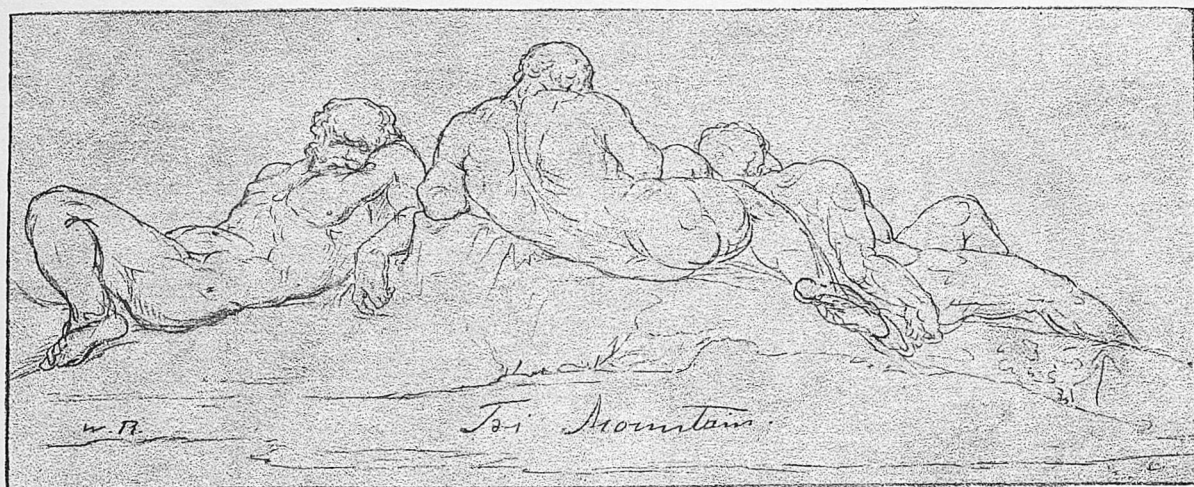
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CHAS. METTAS, FAC-SIM.

WM. RIMMER, DEL.

A STUDY.



REDUCED FAC-SIMILE OF A DRAWING BY DR. WILLIAM RIMMER.

DR. WILLIAM RIMMER.

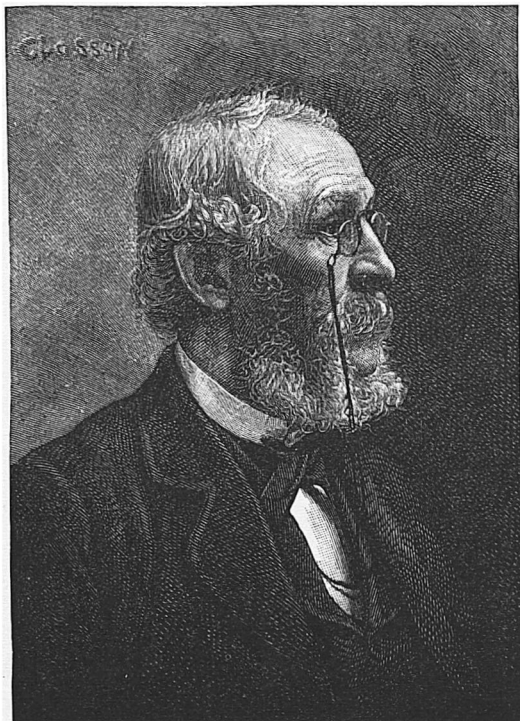
FIRST ARTICLE.



REDUCED FAC-SIMILE OF A DRAWING BY DR. WILLIAM RIMMER.

THE *Boston Journal* of December 10th, 1860, contained a short, but appreciative notice of "a remarkable piece of sculpture in granite, now to be seen at Williams & Everett's, cut by Dr. Rimmer, a practising physician of Quincy." This piece of sculpture—a head of St. Stephen—created considerable interest, because of the unusual anatomical knowledge displayed in it, the novelty of the subject, and the delicacy of its execution in so difficult a material. When it became known that it was executed without a model, and by a man perfectly self-taught, and unpractised in either clay or stone, it was declared a wonder, and much curiosity was awakened regarding its author. At the suggestion of Mr. Stephen H. Perkins, who was an intimate friend of Dr. Rimmer, and familiar with his attempts in sculpture, several gentlemen went to Milton—for here the Doctor really lived, and not in Quincy—to see the unknown sculptor and his works; and they were so much surprised

and gratified at finding a person of such evident power in art, that they seconded Mr. Perkins in advising Mr. Rimmer to come to Boston and open a school. This he decided to do, although with some hesitation, as his health had been so affected by a life of labor and study that he hardly felt strong enough to attempt a task which, while it opened the prospect of a certain degree of artistic enjoyment, required considerable effort for its accomplishment. A room in the Studio Building was secured, and there, in the autumn of 1861 (or 1862?), opened the first school of art in Boston that was taught by a teacher who thoroughly understood the human



DR. WILLIAM RIMMER.

ENGRAVED BY W. B. CLOSSON.—FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.

figure, and was capable of delineating what he knew before the eyes of the pupils.

Dr. Rimmer brought with him from Milton, and placed on exhibition in the school-room, a life-size figure, in plaster, which he called *The Falling Gladiator*. This statue astonished all who saw it as a marvellous specimen of anatomical knowledge and artistic skill, and confirmed the friends of art in the belief that a master had indeed come. The astonishment was increased to wonder, and almost to incredulity, when it was learned that this statue also had been executed without a model, except such help as could be obtained by the sculptor in studying his own body.

The bust, the school, and the statue introduced Dr. William Rimmer to Boston. It was an introduction to public regard such as no one had hitherto enjoyed. The school in the Studio Building, which was at once recognized as an enviable accession to the living art forces of the city, was largely and enthusiastically attended, proving its necessity, and the interest the teacher was able to awaken. In the

winter of 1863-64, Dr. Rimmer gave a course of lectures on art anatomy in the Lowell Institute, which was attended by the leading artists and many of the physicians and professional men of Boston and vicinity, all of whom agreed in gladly testifying that it was the most learned and splendid exhibition of art anatomical knowledge they had ever seen. The method which Dr. Rimmer employed in his school was the most positive of a teacher who had everything he taught at his fingers' ends. Chalk in hand, he drew on a black-board, with great rapidity, correctness, and strength, every possible detail of construction and every variety of movement that the human body possesses or is capable of performing, explaining as he went along with a clearness and enthusiasm as rare as his mastery of the subject was astonishing, the pupils being required to copy the drawings in their sketch-books, and write down the observations accompanying them. There are many elements in this method of teaching that are of great value. To get knowledge of any subject in the inspiring presence and through the voice of a master is the consummation of the pleasure of getting it. It is, indeed, the only method of teaching art. Dr. Rimmer taught by example, and this element is in the best sense artistic, for it forces the pupil to seize the character and construction of the object before him at a glance, and to reproduce it without hesitation. Of its kind the method was comprehensive; of its adaptability to the actual condition of things there is a question. The older artists who attended the classes regarded it as too thorough, too complete: it called for a condition of mind not then existing, and a generosity of time which they could not afford. They were ready to admit that Dr. Rimmer was a great teacher, but they avowed that they could not follow him. A profound study and comprehensive understanding of the human form, in itself and in its relations to the great ideas and purposes of sculpture and painting, is expected of but few artists anywhere, much less of artists in this country. So far as Dr. Rimmer's knowledge of his subject was concerned, he was ahead of his hearers by several generations. Not that there are not minds among us who see as he saw and feel as he felt,—who understand and appreciate the strange fact of his existence; but they have other temperaments and other activities.

After having been appointed Lecturer on Art Anatomy at Harvard College in 1865, Dr. Rimmer was invited, in 1867, to take charge of the School of Design for Women at the Cooper

Institute, New York. Here he found the fullest scope for all his faith, knowledge, sympathy, and strength. When he entered upon his duties the School was in anything but a well-organized condition, and his first care, therefore, was to lay out a course of instruction, of which the following is a synopsis:—Drawing from casts; Drawing from life; Painting in oil and water-colors; Design and composition; Modelling in clay; Elementary principles for teachers; Lectures upon art, anatomy, etc., etc.; Lectures upon systematic and structural botany; Lectures upon primitive forms, viz. action, motion, proportion, etc., etc.; Lectures upon manners, customs, implements, art development and its elements.

If Dr. Rimmer's lectures and teachings in Boston were unparalleled in their scope, and exhaustive of his vitality, what shall be said of the above scheme, to be put in operation by one teacher! That he succeeded in raising the School to a position worthy of the eminent capacity of its Principal is abundantly indicated by the many affectionate tributes of appreciation paid him by the scholars, and by their enthusiastic acknowledgment of the value of his teachings. There are those, however, who assert that his teaching was not a success, and who point to the fact that he remained in the institution only four years as a sufficient proof of their assertion, while others think that he misapprehended the purpose of the School, by giving it an artistic instead of an industrial character. Space does not permit a thorough examination into this subject at this time, but it will be made in a more comprehensive analysis of *The Art Life of Dr. Rimmer*, which is now in course of preparation. That he undertook too much for one man to carry out is true. That he failed in any other sense can only be safely asserted by his peers.

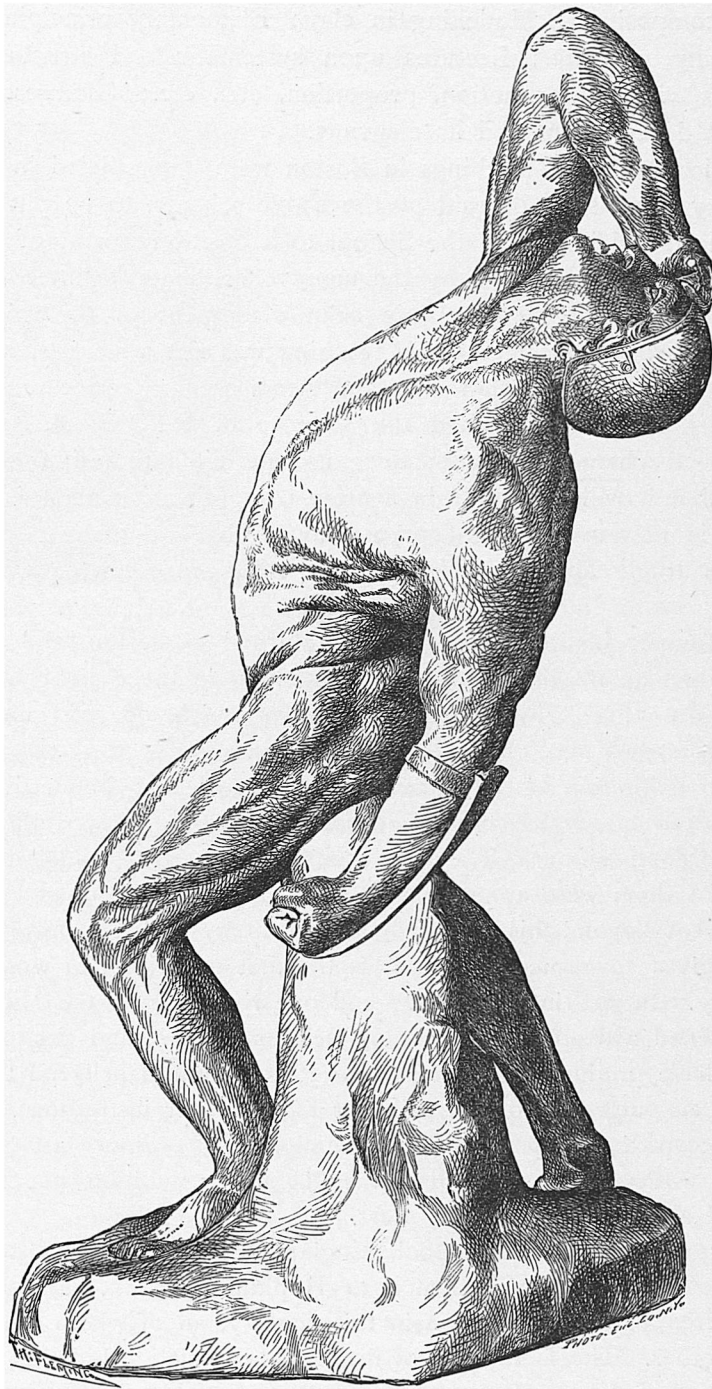
On leaving the Cooper Institute, Dr. Rimmer returned to Boston, and resumed his private classes, until 1876, when he was invited to a professorship in the School of Drawing and Painting at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, a position which he held until his death, which occurred at South Milford, Mass., on August 20th, 1879.

There are now on exhibition at the Museum just named one hundred and forty-six of Dr. Rimmer's paintings, drawings, water-colors, and sculptures, embracing studies of animals, heads, figures, and elaborate compositions. They are a surprise to artists and art lovers, and even to his pupils; for few of them were aware that he produced anything outside of the school-room, or that his powers went beyond his knowledge of anatomy and the facility of suggestion that such a knowledge gives to some minds. It is the first exhibition of works of this kind produced in this country. In art interest it has had one rival only,—the Hunt Exhibition of last winter. It has awakened a deep feeling among serious people, and excited much wonder that an American could have produced such work; for it is generally believed that Dr. Rimmer was a native of Boston, an outgrowth of her soil, her life, and her institutions. If this were so, he would have to be accepted as a prodigy,—an anticipator of ordinary art growth by a hundred years; for there are works, ideas, and possibilities in this exhibition not to be looked for in the first century and a half of any country's art.

William Rimmer was born in Liverpool, England, February 20th, 1816. His family emigrated to Nova Scotia in 1818, and thence to Hopkinton, Mass., in 1824. William was the oldest of seven children, six of them born in this country, all of whom are now dead, with the exception of one brother. The family are of distinguished relationship, but the future Doctor's father, having been deprived by unfortunate circumstances of his rightful heritage, determined to leave his native country, and try his fortune in the New World with the labor of his hands. He adopted the humble trade of a shoemaker, and pursued it as long as he lived. Having been highly educated, and possessing a fine nature, he brought up his children in the love of learning, encouraged them in the expression of their talents, and was their teacher and guide, exacting of them progress in their studies, and the strictest attention to any task in hand. Hard work, comparative poverty, and love of study filled up William's boyhood. The lad was known for his bravery, receiving at an early age two rewards from a Humane Society in Boston,

where he then lived, for saving persons from drowning. His taste for art manifested itself in early years, to the gratification of his father, who not only loved art, but himself painted in resting hours. At the age of sixteen, William carved several figures in gypsum, one of which, still in the possession of the family, is peculiarly interesting, because of its composition and execution. Before he was twenty he had painted a number of pictures of Biblical and historical subjects, and had also illustrated several poems of his own composition. In 1840 he married Miss Mary H. C. Peabody, a New Bedford Quakeress, and soon after removed to Randolph, Mass., where he painted some portraits. In 1846 he went to North Bridgewater, and began the study of medicine with Dr. A. W. Kingman. From there he removed to South Boston, and while he lived here he painted in a studio in Summer Street to gain the means of support for his family, and to buy books for the study of his chosen profession. Dr. W. T. Parker, of South Boston, introduced

later he saw a picture-cleaner at work on this altar-piece, and to his question what it was, and where it came from, received the reply that it was "an old master which had been stored away for a long time." He also took an active interest in all intellectual movements, and belonged to a debating society, where he crossed swords on several occasions with O. A. Brownson.



THE FALLING GLADIATOR.

BY DR. WILLIAM RIMMER.

DRAWN BY TH. FLEMING. — FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.

him to the dissecting rooms, then on Mason Street, where he began the study of anatomy; but he did not finish his studies or enter upon the practice of medicine until he had again moved to Randolph. He remained in the profession sixteen years, during which time he was eminently successful, gaining the gratitude of his patients for his sympathy and unlimited care, and their admiration for his knowledge as a surgeon.

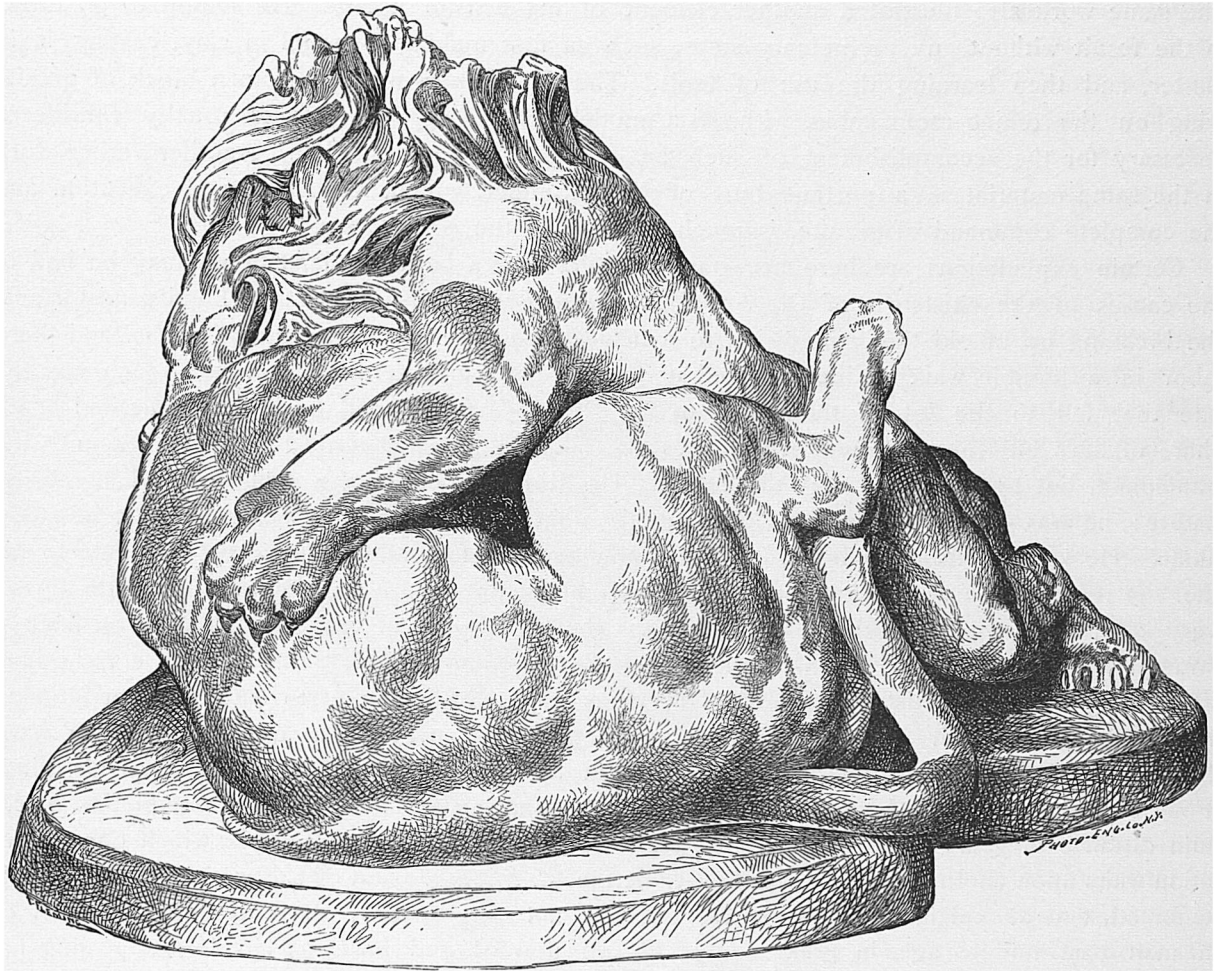
Dr. Rimmer understood music thoroughly, was a good pianist, and played several other instruments. While he lived in Randolph he was invited by Father Rodden to conduct the music and play the organ in the Catholic Church. For the same church he also painted an altar-piece and several smaller pictures. Many years

From Randolph the Doctor went to Chelsea, remaining there for a short time only, as a more advantageous opportunity offered for the practice of his profession in Milton. It was here that he began the serious work of a sculptor, under circumstances against which none but an uncommon nature could have battled. His first work was a small portrait bust of his daughter, cut in marble as he held the block on his knees, and in it he illustrated a cardinal principle of his nature and teaching. He believed in using models and studying life to gain knowledge and a greater power of expression, but in the execution of a work he rarely consulted the model, depending entirely upon his memory and imagination. In executing this bust he relied upon the glimpses he caught as his daughter passed him in the room, as reminders of his memory. The same work also illustrated another element of his artistic nature. He sought to go direct to the result without any preliminary steps, such as first making a model in clay, casting it in plaster, and then learning the use of tools. The *St. Stephen* was cut from a block of granite lying on the dining-room table, without a model or any of the facilities usually considered necessary for the accomplishment of such an extraordinary undertaking. Another earlier work in the same material is a portrait bust of Mrs. Rimmer, which, for delicacy of execution and the complete command of granite, is much superior to the *St. Stephen*.

Certain explanations are here necessary in order that a better understanding may be had of the causes of the existence of the *St. Stephen* and *The Falling Gladiator*. Family misfortune, the breaking up of old ties, emigration to a new and strange country, limited means, and hard labor in a humble walk of life enforced upon high-bred and sensitive natures,—such was the fate that fell to the lot of the family of Dr. Rimmer's father, and he himself inherited a full share of life's bitterness. Perceptive natures do not live unconsciously; they see not only the immediate, but they see and feel the future. Dr. Rimmer possessed a proud, sensitive, retiring nature: he was certain of his capacity; but, do what he might, he felt and knew that he stood alone. He knew it from boyhood. The gypsum figure before alluded to is the key-note to his life. It represents a young man seated, with his knees drawn up and held by one arm to the very chin, while with the other hand he grasps the lower part of his face. The eyes have a strange expression. The figure is gathered together in wondering despair. Having a right to a life among the great artists, possessed of a genius which made him fit to enter into an intimate relationship with their loftiest activities, and a power of production ample enough to have honored a nation, Dr. Rimmer found himself in a desert, and away from men of his kind. Four of his children, all boys, died suddenly, and mourning filled his cup. Through the uncertain distance of years he had hoped that his sons would bring the fruition for which one generation waits upon another. Out of all this came the *St. Stephen*. Out of the spirit of unwelcomed, enforced, and unexplainable suffering came it, and not out of stone. It represents the head of a man past middle age, in great agony, thrown upward and back, as if vainly appealing for protection, while the raised right shoulder indicates the arm uplifted in defence. It was a cry to Heaven for help when he knew that his doom was sealed,—not to be yielded to, however, without a protest, for *The Falling Gladiator* was begun immediately after the completion of the *St. Stephen*, in the month of February, 1861, in the low-windowed basement of a house in Milton. Dr. Rimmer had begun to recognize the value of clay as a medium for the expression of ideas and feelings, but of its proper use in making a statue he knew nothing. It may be unjust to attribute the neglect to familiarize himself with the ordinary helps of a sculptor, before beginning so important a work, to a certain obstinacy. In this instance, as with all worthy works of art, it was the *spirit* first which transformed and conquered all. Certain it is that the Doctor spent little time in the usual preliminaries for the erection of a figure in clay, and that, in consequence, he was obliged to surmount the most annoying obstacles. The *Gladiator* was executed in the two hundred hours which Dr. Rimmer could take from the practice of his profession from February to June, 1861. No adequate idea can be formed of the sad circumstances surrounding the production of this statue, until the diary of its author is given to the world.

He often worked upon it by candle-light, had to do over many times parts that had fallen down, or had been frozen by extreme cold, and he was finally compelled to have it cast in plaster before it was completed, and to finish it in that material, as it was in danger of entire destruction for the want of sufficient support.

Looked at as a work of sculpture, without reference to the facts just mentioned, and even if executed under the most favorable circumstances, the *Gladiator* would appeal to the admiration of the best artists of any time; but, when the almost impossible conditions of its existence are known, it must be pronounced a prodigious work. What sculptor of any age could have done better under the same circumstances? The statue is thoroughly well conceived and composed,



LIONS FIGHTING.—BY DR. WILLIAM RIMMER.

THE ORIGINAL IN THE POSSESSION OF THE BOSTON ART CLUB.

DRAWN BY TH. FLEMING.—FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.

well executed, a fine work of art, and a splendid study of nature. It shows a profound comprehension of the construction, movement, weight, and balance of the human figure; and, if placed side by side with the best nude statues of the French sculptors of to-day, it would be found that what it lacks of nervous touch, of freshness and clearness of form, could easily have been made good by a greater and more constant familiarity with living models. There are some parts of the figure, like the movement of the left side, the line of the back, breast, and abdomen, that seem to be as well understood as they possibly can be. As it is, it taxes the credulity to the utmost to believe that any one, however strong, could have got so much out of the limited facilities enjoyed by Dr. Rimmer. It can only be made credible by the fact that he possessed a marvellous insight into things physical and spiritual. He saw without his eyes,

and this kind of seeing was developed to a high degree in his art work, partly, no doubt, because living models could not then be had at any price. Another notable fact about this figure is that its author was forty-five years of age when he executed it. To succeed as well as he did, without long and constant study and practice before arriving at that age, to get so much of true sculpture touch and sentiment into general form and detail with so little adequate preparation, is indeed a wonder.

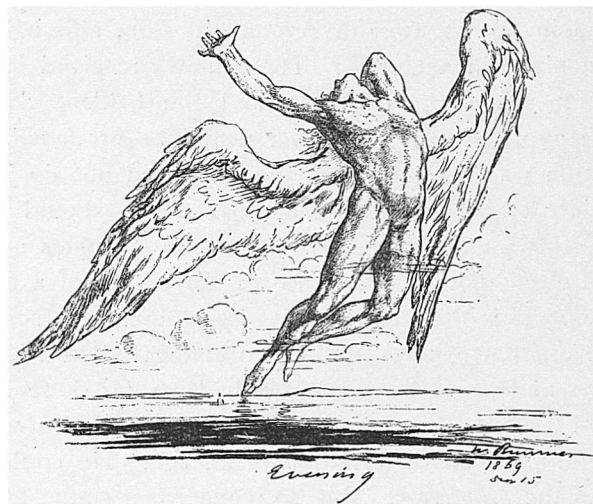
It will be a long time before we have a right to expect as good a work from any American. Many will ask now, and more will ask hereafter, why it is that such a specimen of sculpture has not been, and even now is not, better appreciated; why it has not been reproduced in some lasting and worthy material for some honorable public place; why it has not been duplicated, so as to enable it to find a more general recognition among artists and lovers of art; why it has been suffered to lie in utter obscurity these nineteen years. There is only one answer. We have not yet begun to care or know what form in sculpture or sculpture in form is or means. Bulk contents us. Any image with a name, any attractive personality, we like better than we do art in sculpture. Here and there some one makes a true contribution to our art, but for its own sake, or for our own sakes, we do not seem to take hold of it. The *St. Stephen* mocks us in our own house. Who will ever look at *The Falling Gladiator*, conscious of its history, without feeling that when it was made its author knew that he also was falling in the combat? What is art but the life of a man!

In December, 1864, Dr. Rimmer received the commission to execute the *Statue of Alexander Hamilton*. He made the plaster model, between nine and ten feet high, in eleven days. It was cut in granite, and erected in Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, although it had originally been destined to be placed in a niche in a church. The sculptor received for this work five thousand dollars. Judging from the merits of the *Gladiator* and the evident capacity of Dr. Rimmer, it was expected that a grand expression of his power would be produced. It is the general impression that this expectation was not met, that the artist did not do justice to himself and to the public, and it is certainly to be regretted that this statue should be almost the only work by which he is known to the public at large. The *Hamilton* does not give a full idea of the Doctor's comprehension of form, nor of that sense of movement of a figure which he possessed to such a remarkable degree. It is difficult to believe that the same sculptor made the *Gladiator*. What is the reason of the difference between the two statues? Dr. Rimmer's genius was essentially in sympathy with the nude, and the work he had so far done was himself, taking shape under peculiar conditions of mind. The *Hamilton* had to be clothed; it was a subject outside of himself, an historical figure, the characterization of an age. He could not, therefore, approach it with the same feeling as the *Gladiator*. But to conceive a statue as a character, and not as the mere outward form of a man, to treat it as the typical expression of an epoch, and not simply as a figure illustrating an event or incident, is an evidence of superior imagination. There are indications that Dr. Rimmer did so conceive and treat the statue of Hamilton, and this is a sufficient reason why it ought not to be passed rashly and completely into the numerous company of the condemned. In primitive specimens of the art of sculpture there is a sense of dignity and tranquillity, a harmony, which results from the fact that the work has always been considered as a whole, to the exclusion of a minute consideration of detail. If this comprehension is expressed so that the work has a *presence*, no matter how rudely, so far as detailed anatomical facts are concerned, it is a great merit. The *Hamilton* has this merit. It is not the work of a bungler, or of a trader in so-called American sculpture. It is an attempt at sculpture quite out of the way of violent action or the expression of a mastery of anatomy. It is well beyond the line that marks a want of consideration of subject or ignorance of the sense of effect in form. The resting of the figure on both legs, the hanging by the side of the right arm, the bent left arm, the general scheme of the drapery, are the result of thought. There is a certain dignity about the statue from most points of view; but the best view is a trifle to the

rear of the right side. From this point the entire figure can be seen, and it stands well, looks well, and is good. Nevertheless, that it is as well done as the artist could have done it under more favorable circumstances may be doubted. And it would have been well if he had refused to allow it to be placed in the position it occupies in its present condition. Standing in the niche for which it was originally contemplated, there would have been no necessity for the further development of the back.

The plaster group of *Lions Fighting* was made in 1874, and presented to the Boston Art Club. It is a fine, strong composition, with a great deal of that grip and concentration which characterized its author. There is a bigness about it that carries the mind of the observer to Barye, in spite of a certain lack of animal, which is not to be wondered at when we consider the facilities enjoyed by the great French sculptor, and the total absence of them in the case of Dr. Rimmer.

T. H. BARTLETT.



REDUCED FAC-SIMILE OF A DRAWING BY DR. WILLIAM RIMMER.